

by Irene

Summary: He didn't murder them- he freed them. His Angels. Chosen ones. But Jessie is different. She's his personal favorite.

He stood under the oak tree and looked around. His eyes, shielded by black sunglasses, moved slowly from one person to the next as they hurried by. He looked at the girls with special interest. His eyes liked their soft hair and smooth sun kissed cheeks.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _That one_.^ ^ The voice hissed.^ ^ _It is that one_.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ His blue eyes fell onto long red hair and small petite frame.

_ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Pretty.^ ^ _

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ He sighed heavily. "Not Jessie."

_ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie_. The voices filled the air and swirled around his head.^ ^ _I need Jessie_.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ He could not deny them.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie Bannon stood impatiently on the sidewalk, just in front of the two-story high school.^ She sighed, irritated that Jonny was making her wait. She wanted to go home and take a nap. She was still tired from being out last night attending the big football game.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "See you tomorrow Jessie!"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "See you, Claire!" Jessie waved as the tall blond walked by.^ Looking around she noticed almost everyone was gone.^ She was alone.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Come on Jonny," she mumbled out loud.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Strong arms and firm hands in circled her from behind, swallowing up her small frame in a tight embrace. The strength was overwhelming as Jessie realized her arms were pinned down and she was unable to move. Jessie instinctively started to fight the hold when a familiar voice stopped her.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Miss me?" Jonny laughed at her attempt to break free from him.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "You idiot," she fumed, slightly flustered. She could feel the heat rise up in her cheeks as she shook herself free from his grip. "I almost flipped you over! I could have broken your neck."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "But you didn't," Jonny grinned at her. "Sorry I'm late."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Figures," Jessie muttered more to herself then to Jonny.^ Not that he would have heard her anyway.^ His attention span was about that of a three year old.^ With that thought Jessie smiled to herself.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I almost left without you." She started walking and Jonny fell into step beside her as they made their way home.

"You wouldn't leave me behind," Jonny replied knowingly.

"Don't push it Quest," she warned as she pulled back her dark red hair into a loose ponytail.

Jonny stretched his arms over his head and took a deep breath. He knew when to keep his mouth shut and not push any further.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _I want Jessie._

He watched her closely. He watched as the sun touched her beautiful hair and set the colors on fire.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _Pretty_.

She was strong and extremely intelligent. He would have to take special care of how he handled her. She would be his greatest victory.

"Tomorrow," He whispered softly.

The voices were
 silent.

JQ

Jessie wrestled with her math problem as Jonny, just across from her on the floor, played with Bandit. His books laid scattered and a half-hearted attempt was made on an English essay, but as far as she could tell he was done for the evening.

"I guess I better ask Dr. Quest for help." She clutched her blue notebook to her chest and stopped. She used to ask Hadji, but he was in Bangalore with Neela and Pasha for the next month.

Jessie bit her lip and leaned back against the couch. There was a deep pain in her chest when Hadji was away. She missed being able to talk to him. Email and the telephone could only go so far. There is not a substitute for a person. Especially when the person is Hadji.

Bandit barked loudly as Jonny continued to play keep away with Bandits favorite ball. Jessie watched them with little interest.

Hadji is always on time. Jessie sighed
 as she eyed the bleach hair and bright blue eyes. _He wouldn't have
 kept me waiting. _

He also would never grab her from behind as Jonny had. She turned her attention from Jonny and Bandit as she remembered how she blushed. She was still extremely upset with him. When she thought about it now, she didn't know if it had to do with

him keeping her waiting, or the tight grip he had on her and held for just a little too long.

“What am I thinking?” Jessie rolled her eyes and rose to her feet. She made her way down the hall and into the conference room on the other end of the Quest Compound. She knew her dad and Dr. Quest would be there drinking coffee and studying files.

"This is pretty serious Benton." Race's voice came to Jessie as she stood outside the door. "I don't like it."

"I know Race," Dr. Quest replied.

"What's going on?"

Race and Dr. Quest turned, stunned, and looked at Jessie as she stood framed in the doorway.

"Come in Jess," her father pulled out a chair and Jessie slid into it.

"Did you know a girl named Stephanie Hughes?" Dr. Quest looked down at the shiny table and rested his fingers down on a folder.

"Not personally," Jessie looked over to her father and searched his ice blue eyes for answers. 'Did?' That was past tense. Jessie felt her stomach tighten "She's a senior. I didn't have any classes with her."

"I got a call from a friend on the police force this afternoon." Race maintained eye contact with Jessie and kept his voice calm. "I trained him years ago before I left. He wanted me to give him some advice on a case he was working on."

"What happened to Stephanie?" Jessie looked over to Dr. Quest, who just leaned back in his chair.

"She was murdered" Race said evenly.

"Oh- No!" Jessie could feel the color drain from her face.

"It will be on the eleven o'clock news tonight. They were trying to keep it quiet." Race sighed and rubbed his chin. "They now believe that the person who murdered Stephanie also killed a girl at the Kensley High School last month."

"This is awful," Jessie looked down at her blue notebook that rested in her lap. "When exactly did this happen?"

"Stephanie was murdered around nine and

midnight. She went to the Fall Festival game that you went to at your high school.Â The few they questioned remembered her arriving but no one remembers her leaving."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "I can't believe this." Jessie felt as though the wind had been knocked out of her. "I was at that game and I remember seeing her.Â She was pretty popular. I can't believe that she would just disappear and no one would even notice."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "The person did the same thing to Julie Matthews.Â Kensley High had their homecoming game last month.Â Her friends remember her showing up but they don't recall her leaving.Â She was a sophomore." Dr. Quest opened the folder and Jessie looked down at two young faces." Their homecoming game was against your and Jonny's high school. They think it's someone connected with your school. The media is going to have a field day."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "Why do they think that they were killed by the same person?" Jessie felt that her dad and Dr. Quest were avoiding telling her something.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "They were killed execution style.Â Hands taped together and wearing only a white sheet.Â Who ever did it shot them at point blank range in the back of the head."Â Â Â Â Â

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jessie picked up the two photos and looked over it for any similarities that the two girls may share.Â Both were roughly around the same age.Â

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â The picture was of Julie and whom Jessie assumed was a younger brother.Â He was almost as tall as she was with the same light blond hair and bright blue eyes.Â

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Stephanie had long dark brown hair and dark brown eyes.Â Both had a small frame and were actually very attractive in one-way or another but there wasn't anything more distinctive than that.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "I don't want you out any where alone," her father broke her concentration. "I mean it."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "Sure dad," Jessie smiled slightly. "But I can take care of myself."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "I know Ponchita, but I'm not taking any chances." Race put a firm hand on her shoulder. "I know you can use your head."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "Son?Â Are you all right?" Dr. Quest sounded surprised and concerned at the same time.Â Everyone turned to see Jonny standing in the doorway with an indescribable look across his pale face.Â His blue eyes stared blankly down at the pictures Jessie held in her hands.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "Jonny, did you know Stephanie Hughes?" Dr. Quest asked.

“No,” Jonny took a step back. “I didn't know her or Julie.”

“Are you all right Jonny?” Race stood up and started towards Jonny.

“I'm fine Race.” Jonny cleared his throat and tore his eyes away from the glossy photos. “I'm going to bed.”

Jonny turned slowly and they heard him walk up the stairs. Jessie looked back down at the photos in her hands.

“I didn't think he would re-act like that.” Race spoke in a low careful whisper just incase Jonny was listening, as he obviously had been before from the doorway. “That kid was more nervous then a long tail cat in a room full of rocking chairs.”

“I should have told you two at the same time,” Dr. Quest replied as he looked over to Jessie. “It's very tragic but the attacks have only been on two high school girls so our first reaction was to speak to you.”

“I understand. Don't worry, I'll be careful,” Jessie assured them. Forgetting her math homework, Jessie rose from the table and started towards the door. “Goodnight.”

2. Default Chapter Title

Chapter Two

“Jonny?” Jessie called softly just outside his bedroom door. She was just as concerned with Jonny's reaction as their dads had been and decided to talk to him alone. “Are you awake? Jonny?”

Just as Jessie was about to walk away, the door opened with a soft 'swoosh' and Jonny looked down at her. He was getting ready for bed and she had interrupted him. He was wearing his favorite sweat pants and was about to pull his T-shirt on when he opened the door.

“Are you okay?” Jessie eyed him nervously. She was trying not to notice his bare-chest as he stood and stared at her without expression.

“Why is he acting so odd?” Jessie searched his handsome face for answers.

“Fine,” he opened the door further and Jessie walked into the dimly lit room. Only his nightstand light was on and she was grateful. In this lighting, he couldn't tell she was blushing. “I'm just tired.”

“No kidding,” she smiled. “It's only nine-thirty. You're usually up for two more hours if not

longer."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I just don't feel good." He slid the T-shirt over his muscular frame and ran his fingers through his bleach blond hair.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _That's why his grip was so tight_.^ Jessie thought to herself as she looked over Jonny's strong arms.^ She knew he worked out with her dad but she didn't realize it showed.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I'm sorry I kept you waiting." He looked at her with his blue eyes and Jessie was at a lost.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "It's no big deal," she assured.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I know I was supposed to go to that game with you too." Jonny sighed and sat at the edge of his bed.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "It's no big deal." Jessie relaxed.^ Was this what was troubling him so much? He left early to try and work on his research paper.^ Though she had been surprised, the paper was done by the time she got home.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "They told me because I just happened to walk in the room when they were discussing it." Jessie watched Jonny's face as she explained hoping it would give some indication of how he felt.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I know why they told you," Jonny replied evenly."I know why."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Well," Jessie trailed off, not knowing what to say next.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I'm turning in." He stretched out on his back and closed his eyes.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Goodnight," Jessie stood there for a moment and looked at her long time friend carefully.^ What was going on in his head? Hadji would have an answer.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _But Hadji isn't here_.^ Her inner voice reminded her as she left Jonny's room.^ I'm making a big deal out of nothing_.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie went to bed as well.^ Every time she closed her eyes she saw Stephanie's bright smile as she cheered for her boyfriend on the football team.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _Poor Andy_.^ Jessie's heart broke for him.^ He was a really nice guy.^ She'd seen him in the halls talking to people.^ He had hair almost as light as Jonny's.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _How does someone just disappear?_.^ It was a question that Jessie had no answer for.^ _How does a popular,

well-liked girl disappear from an over crowded event without anyone seeing anything?_

The question stayed with Jessie until she slowly drifted off to sleep.

He knew it was a dream. It didn't matter. It was only in his dreams that he could be this close to her.

To Jessie.

He was brave in his dreams. He could take his finger and run it down her cheek in his dreams. It was only here that he could take a handful of her beautiful hair and feel it slide through his fingers like silk. Her hair was a mixture of mostly red but when he was this close, he could see the blond highlights in it too.

Only in his dreams.

He held her so tight that he felt her heart against his chest. He tried to hold his breath so that he could hear her breathe. He wanted to slow his heart and synchronize it to her own so that he could take a small part of her with him when he woke.

Only in his dreams.

Do not fail me. The voice woke him from his sound sleep.

I wont. He promised.

_You are weak for this girl. Don't forget she belongs to me.

I know. He rolled on his side and tried to go back to sleep. Every time he was about to drift off to sleep, he saw Julie's pleading eyes or Stephanie's tear stained cheeks.

_You saved them. The voice reminded him. _I let you save them._

"I know," he whispered. He closed his eyes once more.

He did save them.

With that thought, he could face their fear stricken faces and hateful eyes as they flashed through his mind. Soon, he was fast asleep and even found his way back into the dreams that lead him into Jessie Bannon's arms.

3. Default Chapter Title

Chapter Three

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie and Jonny were not prepared for what they saw in school the next day. ^ Jessie thought she had some idea but as her dad pulled into the parking lot to drop them off, the media swarmed them and she was speechless.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "We'll have to make a run for it." Jonny leaned in from the back seat and looked over to Jessie who sat in the passenger side.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "This is insane," Race growled. "They won't be allowed in the school. Jonny's right, you better get ready to make a run for it."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I can't believe they're on school property." Jessie sighed as she watched the cameras chase after some kids as they ran into the school.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "It's the sidewalk. ^ They see that as public property," Race replied. "It will cool down. I'll pick you guys up after school. ^ Wait inside until you see the car."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Ready?" Jonny looked over to Jessie. "Go!"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ The two rushed out and dashed to the school doors. Questions flooded in from all around. Jessie tried to ignore the heartless reporters and keep her eyes focused on the doors in front of her but she slipped and feared she was separated from Jonny. ^

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "How does it feel to know this is the second victim?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Did you know Stephanie Hughes?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "What are your thoughts and fears at this time?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Were Stephanie Hughes and Julie Matthews friends?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ One voice after another came at her and she drowned in the sea of insanity. A strong hand came down and lifted her almost completely off the ground. Jessie looked up and saw Jonny's strong profile. ^ He pushed them both forward and soon they were safe inside the school.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Are you okay?" He asked as she straightened her green top.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Fine," she pushed some hair off her face and looked around the room. ^ Kids stood in hushed awkward circles. Some were crying, some were talking softly but all of them looked stunned.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I don't think the normal school schedule will be followed today," Jonny whispered in her ear.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "No kidding," she clutched her book bag and followed Jonny to their lockers.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _I shouldn't have come to school today_.^ He thought to himself as he walked the halls filled with grieving students.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _You didn't want to look guilty did you?^ They asked.^ _Relax, I just need the girl._

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Right_, he sighed and started to feel the weight of his crime as tear filled eyes found his own as he continued to his locker.^ Tear filled eyes like Stephanie's.^ Pleading echoed in the halls as a group of her friends hugged each other and asked _"Why?"^ Just as Julie had asked. _"Why me?"_

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Because they need your strength," he explained as he forced her on her knees.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ She didn't realize that he saved her soul. That was the only reason he could continue to help them. He might end their life in the physical world, but he saved them so they may thrive in the after life.^ ^

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ That's how he could stand to sleep and dream at night.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _It will be over tonight_.^ They assured.^ _You did promise to get her tonight_.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I know." With heavy footsteps, he made his way to his locker.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Hi Jessie," Claire walked up from behind and hugged Jessie as she turned around. "Can you believe this is happening?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "No," Jessie looked over to Jonny who seemed to be in another place as his blue eyes seemed clouded and dark.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "They want everyone to meet in the gym. I think they're going to split us in groups from there and send us to talk to counselors." Claire pulled some of her short blond hair behind her ears and her blue eyes continued to scan the hallway for friends.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I should have stayed home," Jessie sighed.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I'll catch up with you later," Jonny spoke suddenly. "Bye."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Bye," Claire waved to the back of Jonny's bleach blond head as he disappeared into a group of classmates. "What's his problem?^ Did he know Stephanie?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "No," Jessie turned to her locker and worked

the small knob. "Your guess is as good as mine."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I'll be back in a minute and we can walk to the gym together." Claire disappeared before Jessie could reply.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I have a feeling that today will be the longest day of my life," Jessie muttered as she tossed her book bag onto the floor of her locker and slammed it shut with a huff.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ From a distance, blue eyes claimed Jessie from across the busy hallway. Eyes that were watching and waiting in the shadows.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie would be his greatest victory, without a doubt. Now, he even had a plan as to how he would take her.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Sorry, Jessie," he mumbled and headed in the opposite direction. He would need to find Claire.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Claire started back to Jessie when a hand caught her elbow. She turned and looked into blue eyes and blond hair.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Hi," she replied slightly surprised.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I really need a favor," he smiled as he led her into an empty classroom.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Sure," she smiled. Claire never could resist guys with blond hair and blue eyes. "What do you need?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "It's about Jessie," Jonny replied. Claire leaned in close to listen.

4. Chapter Three

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_ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ The police have moved the media off the school grounds and forced them to stand on the other side of the street._ ^ The voices spoke clean and clear.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I know," he whispered as he watched the frustrated reporters leave the student parking lot. The police seemed to be herding them like cattle. The reporters arms stretched out with microphones as they made one last ditch effort to ask the cops questions since the students were off limits.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _I knew they would close school early_. ^ They continued.

“I know,” he replied. “I won't fail you.”

“You don't have room to fail.”

—

He slipped the brown trademark jacket that represented the Quest's. He slipped on large black sunglasses and turned his attention to the mirror in his locker. He re-arranged his hair slightly and stood for a brief moment.

“It will work.” They hissed inside his ears. “Her father has a quite a reputation. This will throw him off his guard.”

“I know,” his monotone voice replied.

“He would never expect you to do this now. No one will.” It's perfect. —

“I know,” he agreed. “It seemed this was all he had left to say.”

To agree and obey.

He walked slowly towards the library. He needed to stay calm and walk off the jitters. He relaxed his walk more as he walked passed the rows of books and the organized groups the students had been placed in.

“Jonny?” Claire called from behind.

He walked faster. He couldn't let her catch up with him. It could ruin everything. He walked through the double doors that lead to the junior lockers and ducked into the boy's bathroom. He cracked the door slightly and saw Claire standing a few short feet away, looking around in confusion.

Taking a deep breath, the last of his anxiety disappeared.

He was ready for Jessie.

Claire looked desperately for Jessie. Ever since her uneasy talk with Jonny earlier, she became nervous and on edge. She had stuck to Jessie like glue through the assembly but they had gotten separated when they were put in groups. She didn't think it was a big deal until she found out they were being dismissed early. She raced to the class Jessie's group was in but no one was there.

“He asks me to do one little thing for him and I screw it up,” she mumbled. “Jonny was such a cutie. She'd hoped this 'favor' would help them to be better friends. But here she was, not two hours later and she couldn't find Jessie anywhere.”

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _Maybe I can catch up with her at her locker if she hasn't left yet. _

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie picked up her bag and swung it over her shoulder. She pulled the wireless phone out of the front zipper and started dialing home to let her dad know school closed early.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "We have a ride," came a familiar voice from behind.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie looked over and saw blond hair and a brown jacket walk by her.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Jonny," she called after him.
"Wait."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jonny turned the corner and flew down the stairs. Jessie fumed. He was really going to get a piece of her mind once she caught up with him.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie watched Jonny's blond hair as it darted through the crowd.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _He's doing this on purpose_. She fumed. _Why? What is with him? _

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ She followed him as he marched on. He was heading towards a different exit. She stepped outside and ran to catch up with him as he headed around a parked car.

_ She followed him as he marched on. He was heading towards a different exit. She stepped outside and ran to catch up with him as he headed around a parked car.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ A police officer approached and an argument broke out between the two. Jessie took the opportunity to catch up with Jonny. She found him at the far end with his back to her. He was standing next to a van. As she approached, he went around and she quickly followed to catch up with him.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ A hand grabbed her by the hair and slammed her face down onto the floor of the van. Dazed, Jessie rolled over and kicked her attacker in the ribs. With out missing a beat, he laid all his weight on her and covered her mouth with a cloth. Within seconds she was unable to move or scream for help.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ She was being kidnapped. Just like the others.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie rolled her groggy head to the side. She watched as _Jonny_ took his jacket off and removed his glasses.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _' How does someone disappear without anyone seeing anything?' _

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _They're tricked_.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Eyes, that were not Jonny's, looked down at her with deep pain.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I'm sorry Jessie," he whispered. "It isn't anything personal."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ The darkness began to over take her.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _I don't know who you are_, her inner voice replied dangerously.^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _But I'm going to kill you._^ ^ ^ ^ ^

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ There was silence.

5. Chapter Three cont.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Claire started down the hallway.^ To her relief she saw Jessie by her locker just as Jonny walked by.^ The two quickly disappeared into the crowd.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I guess he doesn't need my help after all." She turned to her locker and started working the locker combination.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Claire?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ The voice surprised her and she jumped.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Jonny?" her voice cracked.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Where's Jessie?" he looked up and down the hall.^ "Claire?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "She's," Claire could barely get the words out. She pointed in the direction she saw Jessie and 'Jonny' go. "She's with you."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jonny's face fell.^ The bad feeling he had last night, just got ten times worse.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I'm sorry Jonny," Claire exclaimed as she read the panic in his eyes. "He had the same color brown jacket that you always wear and he has the same color hair!^ I'm so sorry! I'm sure it's okay!^ Jessie will realize it's not you and she'll be back.^ What could happen with all the police and reporters around?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ " Just like a busy football game?" Jonny challenged.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ " I'm sorry." Claire mumbled again but Jonny was already heading in the direction she had pointed in.

Jonny ran outside and looked around. He tried to look for anything out of the ordinary. He scanned the parking lot for anyone with blond hair similar to his. He looked over the cars and watched as students scattered and left the building. He started walking and almost got himself hit by a white van because he was distracted with finding Jessie.

He felt as though wind had been knocked out of him. His heart beat madly within his chest and throbbed in his ears.

He knew. Deep inside, he knew.

Jessie is gone.

He ran to a police officer who stood nearby.

"Have you seen a girl with long red hair?"

Jessie is gone.

"You're going to ask me that at a high school with a body of over 2000?"

Jessie is gone.

"How many red heads are there?" Jonny shot back angrily.

"Sorry," the woman said. "Hey!" the woman turned her attention to a reporter. "I told you to get off school property!"

Jessie is gone.

Jonny turned and ran inside to call Race.

He drove into the garage of his parent's house and waited until the garage door slid to the ground before he moved. The last traces of sunlight disappeared and turned to look behind him.

Never had he been so proud of an achievement. He had Jessica Bannon. The Jessica Bannon. The girl that seemed to walk on air as she passed by. The girl that seniors stopped and noticed. The girl that sat four desks in front of him in their English Literature class.

Four desks in front but she never looked behind her. They stated.

"It's okay," he whispered.

“She'll wake up soon.” They warned him.

“No,” he whispered as he slid his safety belt off. “I just need a few minutes alone with her before you take her away.”

“Don't be stupid.” They hissed. “You need to tie her up. You have a mission. Do not fail me.”

“I won't,” he assured as he bent next to Jessie's still form. “I just need a minute.”

6. Chapter Four

Chapter Four

Jonny sat in the chair and stared at the wall as Race paced the room, yelling into the phone.

“Police everywhere, Harry!” Race's voice echoed all over the compound. “Reporters lurking around and no one saw a thing!”

Jonny kept replaying what Claire had said. She thought Jessie had been with him. The guy looked like him.

“I know! I know!” Race continued. “I need anything you can give me. This is my daughter Harry!”

Jonny replayed everything in his mind. He slowed down his actions and played them again.

“Five minutes?” Race stopped moving in circles. “Thanks pal.”

Jonny could remember every detail of the parking lot. The police officer's face as she sarcastically blew him off.

“Harry's in route here,” Race announced. “We're going to find Jessie.”

Jonny could feel the wind from the van as it came within inches of hitting him.

“Jonny?” Race stood over Jonny's pale figure. Jonny's eyes came to life as he looked up at Race.

The van.

He hated taping her up, but it was for the best. He removed her jacket and taped just above her elbow straight up to the wrists. He taped her legs, above the knee and around the ankles. With much

hesitation, he placed the last piece over her mouth.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _You did a good job Micah_.^ They applauded.

"Thank you," he smiled.

Really, it is your best work yet_.

Micah placed Jessie on his bed and laid next to her. He wanted to close his eyes and hold her close enough to hear her heart as he had some many times in his sleep. Only this time, when he opened his eyes she would really be there and it wouldn't be a just a dream.

Harry was out of the patrol car before it came to a complete stop. Race met him in the drive with Jonny close by.

"Sorry, Bannon," the large middle-aged man
 replied as he followed Race into the compound.

"Dr. Quest," Harry stretched out his hand and
 the two men shook. "Wish the circumstances were better."

“Me too,” Dr. Quest replied.

"Harry," Race interrupted. "We might have a
led. Jonny thinks the kidnapper is a student at his high
school."

"Really?" Harry stood still for a moment and looked at Race closely. "It would help if we could narrow that down."

Q A student who owns or his parents own a white van."

"That should help." Harry took out a notebook
 and started writing in it.

"Wait," Jonny stepped forward. "The guy looks similar to me. He's about my height and has the same color hair."

"Mike," Harry called to a young cop behind him.
 "Get the school yearbook we borrowed from Stephanie's
 parents."

Jessie never had such a bad headache in her
 entire life. It was all around her and even stiffened her neck. She
 kept dreaming she was stuck in her sleeping bag. She couldn't find
 the zipper and get free.

Then she opened her eyes.

"I'm glad you're awake," the boy replied as he
 leaned over her. "We'll have some time to spend together before I

have to finish up."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _Finish up?_ ^ Jessie looked down at her limp body. ^ He'd taped her up good.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I've wanted to talk to you for so long." He put his cheek in the palm of his hand and gazed at her with his insane dark blue eyes.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I'll remove the tape," he put a finger to her face and touched her lightly. "But if you scream, that's it."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ The tape tore her skin and her eyes watered slightly.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Do you feel better?" he asked.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "No," she spoke harshly.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Don't be like that," his voice became low and his eyes seemed to flash as though something dark passed over him. "My name is Micah."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "What's going on?" she asked cautiously. ^ She needed to by time for her dad.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "You're going to be set free." He smiled a wide smile that went from one ear to the next. "You've been chosen. You're lucky he found you before something bad happened."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ _You've got to be kidding_. ^ Jessie looked at the dark blue eyes carefully. ^ _This kid is completely insane_.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "They called me to gather the angels." He looked off into the distance. "To gather the angels who wait at the gate of heaven."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "How do they know who the angels are?" Jessie could hardly believe she was playing into this, but she needed to give her dad as much time as possible to find her.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "God sent the voice to me." He looked down at her and the shadows covered his face and she could only see his silhouette. "The voice knows and they tell me."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "They picked me?" Jessie tried to keep her voice level and calm.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "You were chosen before your birth." He leaned down and looked deep into her eyes. "You have forgotten where it is you come from. ^ But they know your name."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "The voices?" she whispered.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Yes," he laid on his side next to her and straightened some of her hair.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Right," her voice gave out slightly. She tried

not to think about how bad the situation was.Â

She was taped up, she some where she didn't know, unconscious for an unknown amount of time and on the bed of a crazy man who thought he had been called by god.Â

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â _I've got to find away out of here!_Â Jessie looked around the small cluttered bedroom.Â _Fast!_

7. Chapter Four cont.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "Five," Harry announced out loud.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "I counted seven," a younger officer reported.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "We need to find out which of these seven has access to a white van."Â Harry marked the last of the pages in the yearbook and looked over to Race. "We have a good lead. We're going to find her."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "I appreciate you trying to warn me ahead of time." Race let out a deep breath. "I know you're taking a lot of heat just talking to me."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "Come on Racer," Harry smiled. "We know what really counts on the force."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "I think this guy is the closest," Jonny interrupted as he shoved the yearbook in front of them. "Micah Williams, he's in our grade."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "I got it," Harry pulled a cell phone out and called the school to request the records. "I'll also get the address for the others.Â We can hit them all at the same time."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jonny sat down on the couch and tried to clear his mind.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "It isn't your fault son," Dr. Quest put his hand on Jonny's shoulder and smiled warmly. "We know how much Jessie means to you."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "I was on time," Jonny replied quietly. "Today I would have been on time and the guy still beat me to her. I even secretly asked one of her friends to keep a close eye on her.Â I knew she'd know what I was doing if I hung around her. She's so defensive."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "It's okay Jonny," Dr. Quest assured. "With your help the police now have a sound lead that they didn't have before."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "Last night," Jonny choked up slightly. "When I over heard what you were talking about, and then when I walked in and saw the faces of the two girls, I froze.Â They both looked similar to Jessie.Â Their face shape and smile.Â It was unreal."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "I know son," Dr. Quest sat on the arm of the

couch. "That's why Harry called Race and leaked the information to him. He knew he'd see the resemblance. A profile specialist says the killer is targeting certain attractive girls; blondes with blue eyes brown-haired girl with brown eyes, a red head with green eyes seemed the most logical next target."

"Jessie didn't see it." Jonny looked over at Harry and Race as Harry wrote something down in his notebook. "I heard her talking to you and I knew she didn't get it. She doesn't think she's pretty."

"Let's move," Race flew out of the room with Jonny close on his heels.

"Don't be stupid, Bannon," Harry warned as they all headed to their cars. "Call if you need back up."

"I'll stay behind!" Dr. Quest called after the group as they left.

"When I was five my parents had me baptized in a creek near our home in Ohio." Micah looked into Jessie's green eyes and smiled. "They held me under so long I thought I would drown."

"Really," Jessie squirmed slightly. Micah was preparing her for her death. He looked back down at her long slim fingers and continued to scrub them with scolding hot bleach water while he wore bright yellow gloves. Her hands became red and tender. Jessie kept her focus on Micah. She kept her mind on finding out what she could. She kept her mind on her dad. She kept her mind focused on anything but the pain.

"Yes, they have to make sure the sin was washed out," he smiled as he took a long pocketknife and dug in between the nail and her skin to scrape out some invisible dirt. "It's kind of funny now that I think about it."

"Is it?" Jessie tried to control her anger but it crept out in her sarcastic reply.

"They're going to hell," he sighed. "They got a divorce. The voices told me that."

"Whe.." Jessie cringed as a thin line of blood drained from her index finger. Micah moved to the next finger in line. "When did they come to you?"

"In the last six months." He stopped and leaned close to her. "I was sleeping and I woke up thinking there was a radio under my pillow."

"I see," Jessie stiffened as he returned his attention to her finger and again scraped until she bled. Apparently, if he scrapped under her nails until she was bleeding, she was considered clean. "That's when they told you their mission?"

"No, MY mission." he finished with her right hand and moved to her left. "As angels, you became unclean and were

cast down. They need your heart. Don't worry."

~~~~~ "I'm beyond that point," Jessie smiled despite herself.

~~~~~ "They need your heart but I will save your soul." He kissed her ring finger and let his tongue pick up the small line of blood. "I've always wanted to be this close to you. I'm sorry it has to be like this."

~~~~~ "Micah," Jessie felt a rise of panic creep up her back. She needed to distract him. "Have you ever told your parents about the voices?"

~~~~~ "I was sloppy with Julie," He confessed as he dunked her hands into the scolding bleach water. Jessie closed her eyes and swallowed her tears as the bleach found its way into the cuts under her fingernails. "I'm better now. That's why you don't need to worry."

~~~~~ "Micah?" Jessie forced the tears back.

~~~~~ "Julie was the easiest to grab." He pulled her hands out and inspected them as he continued to ignore her. "I pretended to be hurt and she thought I was her brother and came running."

~~~~~ "Micah?" Jessie raised her voice slightly.

~~~~~ "Stephanie was a bit more difficult. I'm not built like her boyfriend so I basically slipped her a note and told her she needed to call home. I drove up and grabbed her when she left to find the pay phones. She didn't have much fight in her and at a game, no one hears one person scream."

~~~~~ \_I'm not going to get any answers\_. Jessie bit her lip and concentrated on thinking of a way to be alone just long enough to get her hands on the pocketknife.

~~~~~ "You needed special care," he smiled slightly, as though he was complimenting her. "I knew you would be different. I watched you with your boyfriend. You're stronger than the others and much smarter."

~~~~~ \_Jonny?\_ Jessie couldn't break away from his gaze.

~~~~~ "I didn't have to drug the others." He finished up on her last finger. "I even tested my appearance with Claire to make sure I could fool you."

~~~~~ "You know Claire?" Jessie asked.

~~~~~ "She almost caught up with me," Micah continued to ignore her. "I knew if I could fool her, well, I would most likely be able to trick you. At least from a distance."

~~~~~ \_That's why he stayed so far ahead of me.\_

—  
"Now," he threw her hands down in her lap and slid the pocketknife into the back pocket of his jeans. "I just need to straighten your hair."

Micah pulled a brush off his dresser and knelt on the floor next to her. He carefully brushed her hair and hand worked the tangles so the brush would glide right through. It gave Jessie chills the way he handled her with such gentleness knowing he was going to end her life soon.

"It won't be long now." He stood back and gazed at his work.

Micah, they called him from the distance.

Micah closed his eyes for a moment and cracked his neck as he tossed it from side to side like a broken toy. He looked down at Jessie with such hate it was as though he was possessed.

"It is time," he growled.

\_You better believe it\_. Jessie braced herself. She wasn't going without a fight.

## 8. Chapter Five

### Chapter Five

Jessie, are you okay? Jonny tried to imagine what she was going through at that moment. He didn't want her to be alone.

He didn't want to be alone.

"We're almost there," Race grumbled in a low heated tone.

\_My best friend\_. Jonny made a fist and bit down on his anger. \_My best friend is missing. \_

Micah turned his back and picked up the tape on his bed. He carefully gathered a white sheet that was neatly folded the night before.

\_Now or never!\_ Jessie swung her legs around and knocked Micah off his feet. As he turned to face her, she brought her elbows down as hard as she could on his chest. Micah was unprepared and hunched over in pain.

\_I just need to cut the tape off my legs.

—  
Jessie took advantage of Micah's shocked reaction and fumbled through his pockets. Her fingers grazed the pocketknife but because she was taped up, she couldn't maneuver

around to grab it.

Then Micah regained his senses.

"What are you doing?" he reached around and grabbed her by the hair. "Don't do this Jessie!"

"You are sick!" she spat out in frustration. "You need help!"

Jessie never saw his hand she only felt herself slam against the wood floor. Then, slowly, painfully the full effect of his blow began as a tingle on her cheek and spread to a massive pain on the left side of her face.

"They were right," he hissed quietly.

\_I can't focus!\_ Jessie closed her eyes and drowned briefly in her hurt jaw. Her tongue grazed through and wiggled one of her teeth. She could already taste a familiar metallic substance in her mouth. She was bleeding, bad.

"No more out of you." He bent down and roughly taped her mouth shut.

\_It's not over.\_ Jessie continued to act disoriented as her mind cleared. She needed one more good strike, only this time she'd really give it to him.

"I'm going to have to redo your hair." He stood over her and he wrung his rough hands nervously.

\_Wait until after.\_ They whispered soothingly into his ear.

"Will it make a difference?" he raised his head up.

\_No,\_ they replied.

"Then," he returned his attention to Jessie.

Jessie brought her legs up and struck him in the knees. Micah fell on his side and Jessie kicked him in the neck. She took no notice of him as he started choking and gargling. She went through his jeans and grabbed the pocketknife.

Micah started to come to and Jessie roughly elbowed him in the back.

\_I'm never going to get enough time to cut all this tape off!\_ Jessie fought with the small knife in her shaking fingers.

Micah surprised her and landed right on top of her. He slammed her sore jaw into the floor.

“I told you.” They hissed. “We don't have enough time for this.”

“I won't let her go to hell!” he screamed.

“It doesn't make any difference.” They seemed to slide behind the walls of his room. Micah could tell they were getting impatient with him.

“It will be okay,” he whispered. He picked up Jessie's limp body and put her over his shoulder.

Jessie swung helpless and drained of all energy. Her jaw throbbed and she still had not recovered from what ever he used to knock her out.

Without any strength left, the pocketknife slipped from her fingers and fell to the floor.

“Dad? Dad where are you?” Jessie closed her eyes and fought to keep herself calm.

## 9. Chapter Five cont.

Jonny watched as the scenery flew by his window. Race made the car fly around the corner and the tires skidded across the pavement, screeching as Race regained control of the car.

“I'm going to kill that kid,” Race muttered under his breath. “If he's hurt Jessie in anyway, I'm going to end his pathetic life.”

“She's okay,” Jonny said this more for his benefit then Race's.

He honestly didn't know what he would do if anything happened to Jessie. They had always been in trouble together. They worked well together. Now, she was somewhere alone and he didn't know what was happening to her. It was driving him crazy.

“She better be or someone is really going to get it.” Race threatened and Jonny watched the Race's ice blue eyes turn to fire.

They pulled into a long driveway and stared at a beautiful two story house.

“Not what I expected,” Jonny confessed as he noted the care taken in the yard. Bushes trimmed perfectly and even a small water fountain in the garden.

“Let's move,” Race breezed across the lawn and skipped every other step leading up to the house.

BANG! BANG! BANG! Race's fist shook the door and rattled the windows.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ A knock at the door stopped Micah in his tracks and seemed to rattle the small dirty house.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_Please be Dad!\_ Jessie couldn't see what was happening.^ Micah back stepped fast and slammed her into the closet of his bedroom.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I will kill anyone who walks in this house," Micah warned with a low voice. "Don't make any noise."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ BANG! BANG!

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Micah shut his door and returned to the front room.^ He looked out the window and sighed.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_Relax\_, they demanded of him.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I know," he took a deep breath and turned the knob.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_If you hadn't been soft\_, they continued to hiss.^ \_You'd be done by now\_.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I know."^ It was all he had left to say.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Hi," Micah smiled at the face before him. "What's going on?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie laid as a crumbled lump on the floor of the dark closet.^ She tore the piece of tape off her mouth and spit out a clump of blood that had built up.^ Her stomach turned from the blood she already swallowed and she couldn't seem to clear her head.^ She held her breath and listened to see if she could hear anything.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_Please be Dad!\_^ Jessie wiped tears from her eyes.^ She was running out of time.

## 10. Chapter Five cont.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jonny looked for any traces of a van or anything that looked suspicious.^ He looked for a place where a killer would hide his victims.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Nothing. No shed, no people, no-where to hide.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_I have a bad feeling about this\_.^ He shook his head and returned to Race.^ The two men held their breath as the door opened.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "May I help you?" the woman who opened the door and smiled slightly as her small brown eyes moved cautiously from Race to Jonny.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Are you Micah's mother?" Race's voice was firm and low.

“Yes,” she looked down at them with concern.  
“Is something wrong?”

“We just need to talk to your son,” Jonny  
replied calmly to keep from hearing Race's growl.

“I'm sorry,” she nervously clutched at the  
door. “He isn't here.”

“Do you know where he is?” Race asked  
impatiently.

“I'm sorry, but if you don't tell me what this  
is about,” she started to back away. “I'm not answering anymore  
questions concerning my son. I don't know either one of  
you.”

“Please,” Jonny put his hand out to prevent her  
from closing the door in their faces. “It's a matter of life and  
death. I'm from his school. We just need to ask him a few questions  
concerning the recent deaths. We think he can help us.”

“Jessie isn't here.” A soft voice whispered  
from Jonny's heart.

“He lives with his father,” she stated after a  
moment of silence.

“This is the address in the school files.”  
Jonny felt his heart sink.

“Jessie isn't here.” Jonny knew without a  
doubt.

“I think Micah is a little embarrassed of that  
rat hole his father calls a home,” she smiled slyly as she said ‘rat  
hole’ and Jonny relaxed.

“Where does he live?” Race asked.

“I'll write down the address for you,” she  
smiled and opened the door for them to come in.

“Thank you,” Jonny followed as he and Race  
walked in the nicely decorated front room that was complete with a  
large chandelier.

“Here you are,” she handed a small business  
card to Race and smiled. “My number is on the front incase you need  
anything. If Micah is involved in something, his father will  
neglect to tell me and then claim I'm not interested in Micah's  
life.”

“Thank you, Mrs.?” Race shook her  
hand.

“Mrs. Hanely and you're welcome,” she  
smiled.

“We're running out of time,” Race muttered under his breath as he slid into the driver's side of the car.

“I know a short cut to this street,” Jonny said as he looked over the card.

“We're going to play ball,” the freckled kid smiled at Micah as he gestured to his two friends behind him.

“I can't today guys,” Micah smiled at the young kids. “Maybe after dinner later tonight. We can play in my driveway. My dad put a new bulb in the outside light.”

“Okay,” the note of disappointment was evident in the young boys voice. Micah knew the kids on the street looked up to him.

“Sorry,” Micah apologized again as the group turned to leave.

“After dinner!” they called as they left the yard.

“Do it quickly. You're out of time.” They impatiently beat into his brain.

“I know.” Micah returned to his room.

Jessie wasn't where he left her.

“Jessie?” he growled. He tore up the closet as if she was small enough to hide under his shoes and laundry.

Click.

Micah froze. It was a soft sound and he turned quickly to see if he could figure out where she was.

The bathroom.

“She was hiding behind the door.” The voices replied. “You better think of something.”

“I know,” Micah sighed.

## 11. Chapter Six

### Chapter Six

Jessie frantically looked around the sink and found a small pair of scissors. They were meant for hair but she started hacking away at the tape around her legs. The tape was so thick she had to work a layer at a time. Jessie caught sight of her reflection in the mirror. She was unrecognizable. A swollen cheek and lip hid under a tangled web of dark red hair.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_When dad sees this, he'll kill Micah. If I don't do it first.\_

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Jessie?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie froze.^ That voice.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Jess are you here?"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ There was a rumbling sound followed by a mad dash down the hall.^

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_Jonny?\_^ Jessie couldn't move.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Race she isn't down here!" he screamed angrily.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie put her hand to the knob.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Dad?" Jessie pushed the door open.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Micah was waiting on the other side.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "No more games," he hissed in her ear as he swung her around and placed a butcher knife to her throat.

\_ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Time's up.\_^ The voices replied dryly.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I know." Micah seemed to reply to the air as he mumbled.^ He grabbed a handful of her hair and slammed her face into the wall. "No more."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie lost her sense of being and for a paralyzing moment, couldn't remember where she was.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_Stupid!\_^ She beat herself up as he carried her easily down the basement steps\_.^ He sounded like Jonny when he walked past my locker today! I'm so stupid to fall for that again!

—

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie crumbled to the floor as Micah slid her off his shoulder.^ He doubled the layer of tape around her hands and continued up to her fingers.^ He then re-taped her legs.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_You're out of time.\_^ The voices reminded Micah.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I know," he mumbled.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_She always hated you.\_^ They replied from their hiding places in the dark shadows of the basement.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "I don't want to hear it," Micah muttered.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_You've jeopardized 'us' for this girl who doesn't even appreciate what you're doing for her\_.

“I know,” his voice cracked slightly as he gave in to their nagging. Working on automatic, he obediently went to the workbench for the canvas.

“SHE never looked behind her.” They grew softer. “How long have you been going to the same school?” SHE never looked around her, just in front of her. “She's like all the others. Vain.”

“No,” Micah muttered.

“Selfish.”

“Stop,” Micah grabbed his head and froze. Slowly, he grabbed a white sheet.

“Hatefully.”

“It isn't her fault,” he whispered as his rough hands smoothed out the sheet he'd prepared for her to wear.

“There's no one here but you and me,” Jessie mumbled under her breath. She was tired of watching Micah march around the room talking to his shadow.

“Shut Up!” he screamed with fire in his dark blue eyes. He took out a dark canvas sheet from under a workbench and spread it out in front of her.

Dark red blotches laid before her.

Jessie felt as though her insides had been dunked in ice water.

“This was where he killed the other girls. This was where he was going to kill me.”

Jessie couldn't breathe. Her time was up.

“Now,” Micah returned his attention to her and carefully picked up a white sheet with a hole in the center.

“Micah,” she heard her voice whisper his name but it was no longer real. “She couldn't be here in this basement. She couldn't be here tied up and bleeding. She couldn't be here looking at the end.”

“Don't worry,” he replied sliding her head through the hole. “I'm the one who frees the angels.”

“You won't get away with this,” she whispered still trapped in her surreal state of mind.

“People always say that,” he smiled sadly at her and placed her at the center of the canvas. “When they get desperate they always use that line. Trying to buy some time?”

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Micah knelt down next to her and took her chin into his hand.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "There is no more time for you."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ The words burned Jessie and she felt a panic start to over take her.^ The panic that she had been able to keep just far enough from over coming her.^ The panic was now overwhelming her.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Micah looked down at her.^ His tangled blond hair fell into his face.^ He wiped the sweat from his upper lip and his busy eyes took her in one last time.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie was tired.^ Her whole body was tired.^ Her legs ached from being cramped in one position.^ Her fingers were becoming numb and her head still hadn't recovered from what he used to knock her out when he kidnapped her.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "This is you," he whispered gently, kneeling before her with a small picture he'd clearly ripped from a bible.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Jessie looked down at the three young girls illustrated in the picture.^ They were the same height and all had their hair parted nicely in the middle. Their hands were in a frozen prayer and their white gowns crowned off their serene appearance.^ One had blond hair with blue eyes. One had brown hair with brown eyes.^ The last one had red hair with green eyes.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Perfect," he sighed.^ He gently touched each one with his finger and rose slowly to his feet.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_'Execution style.'\_ Her father's voice echoed in her head as Micah slowly walked behind her.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_Finish it quickly\_.^ The voices were a chorus of darkness that swam in the shadows behind him.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "Our dear lord in heaven," Micah began softly. "Forgive us sinners.."

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_It wasn't just an execution style\_, Jessie realized.^ \_He was praying for them. Taped them in a specific position, so they would be praying themselves\_.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "As one that was lost is now foundâ€¦"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ \_He's really going to do it\_.^ Jessie closed her eyes.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "As we are all short of the gloryâ€¦"

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ Her father wasn't going to save her.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ "It is by your mercy that we sinners are savedâ€¦"

She was out of time.

"By your love that we find peace in a world filled with sin..."

Out of ideas.

"Prepare us a place at your table, at your feet"

Out of faith.

"Open your arms"

A small click was heard behind her. It was a gun.

" . . . for one of your own is coming home."

\_I love you mom\_. Jessie felt the hot tear fall down her cheek.

The unmistakable sound of a gun echoed in the small room, throwing Jessie face down into the dirty canvas.

## 12. Chapter Seven

### Chapter Seven

Race missed the driveway and stopped the car almost in the center of the brown yard.

Jonny took in the depressing surroundings. A large dead tree leaned dangerously close to the roof of the house. The yard was covered with statues of the Virgin Mary and crosses.

\_She always looks the same\_. Jonny looked down at the small statue of a young woman with brown hair. Brown hair parted in the middle . . . hands at a constant state of prayer.

—

Jonny lost his breath.

\_Jessie is here. \_

"Harry," Race called over the walkie-talkie. "We believe Jessie may be at 436 Westchester Street. I need back up. No sirens! Over."

"Don't do anything foolish! I mean it Bannon! Do you read me? Bannon?"

Race and Jonny jumped out as Harry was heard barking orders.

Race started up to the house and knocked on the

door.Â Jonny went around the side and noted the vacant backyard.Â He looked into the window of the garage and took in the white van.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â \_Jessie is here. \_

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â He heard Race knock harder with no reply to his first attempt.

\_Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jessie was here.Â Jonny froze.Â He felt his heart leap out and crash into his ribs.Â \_Jessie isn't here anymore.  
—

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "No," he wouldn't give in to his worst fears. He wouldn't know a world without Jessica Bannon in it.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jonny fell to the ground and peered into the tiny basement window.Â It appeared to be the laundry room but a curtain prevented him from seeing past the white machines.Â He forced the small window open and slid down quietly.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â \_Jessie HAS to be here.Â \_

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jonny heard a voice chanting softly.Â He moved the long curtain away, that separated the laundry room from the rest of the basement and looked at the tall blond figure. . .looking down at a small form with red hair.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jonny watched Race's shadow emerge slowly from the other direction. He was creeping down the stairs as quiet as possible.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â \_He's too late. \_

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jonny lunged for the tall figure and he was sure he heard a gun go off as he was in mid air.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jessie looked at the canvas with her blurry vision.Â The shot echoed in her head and blood filled her mouth.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â \_I'm not dead\_.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jessie tried to move but couldn't.Â

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â \_I'm not dead. \_

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Something heavy crushed her.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â \_I'm not dead\_.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Jessie felt herself being pulled up.Â She had a head rush that blinded her momentarily.

\_Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â I'm not dead\_.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Someone was holding her.Â Someone was rocking her back and forth.Â Someone was breathing warmly in her ear and pulling her hair back from her face.

\_!\_ The voice in Jessie's head came through and she realized to her relief, she had not been shot.

She opened her eyes and focused down at her legs as they were slowly being untapped.

Jessie looked to her side and followed the strong chest up to the handsome face.

\_Jonny \_

"Are you okay Jess?" he was breathless as he examined her swollen lip and bruised cheek.

"Just a minute ponchita," her father whispered as he hacked at the layers of tape with his pocketknife.

"Micah," she replied in a mechanical voice.

"He's dead," her father grunted. "I shot him."

"It's over," Jonny whispered.

"Hot Damn," came a gruff voice from behind. "You okay Race?"

"Yes, Harry," Race kissed the top of Jessie's forehead and gently touched her purple cheek, all the while Jonny looked on without expression or letting up his hold on Jessie.

### 13. Chapter Eight

#### Chapter Eight

"How do you feel Jessie?" Dr. Quest asked as she walked into the kitchen.

"Much better," she smiled at the group of men at the table, all were waiting for her response.

"Glad to hear it," Dr. Quest returned the smile.

"Sleep okay?" Race questioned.

"Fine," she replied.

Jessie helped herself to some orange juice and toast placed at the small wooden table. Her lip was still slightly swollen but she was happy to recognize her reflection in the mirror.

"Your mother will be in this afternoon," Race replied without the hint of irritation in his voice that was all too often present when he spoke of his ex-wife.

“I'm glad she can come up.” Jessie pulled out the chair and sat across from Jonny, who hadn't said anything to her since her release from the hospital yesterday afternoon.

“It will be nice,” her father agreed.

Jessie smiled at her dad. He must have checked on her five times last night.

“I received a call from the police,” Dr. Quest began slowly. Jessie knew he was making sure it was okay to bring up the incident.

“What did they have to say?” Jessie asked.

“Micah had a brain tumor,” he answered. “That's why he heard voices.”

“That is unreal Benton,” Race shook his white head and rose to his feet.

“I know,” Dr. Quest agreed and rose from his seat as well. “He was a talented artist and popular boy in his neighborhood. It's a shame this happened to him.”

Jessie watched them leave and looked over to Jonny, who still sat quietly in front of her.

“Are you okay?” she asked him.

“Fine,” he replied simply.

“Sure,” she smirked. “You natural look like that all the time. I just forgot.”

“Like what?” his familiar smile and glowing eyes returned to her.

“The appearance of someone with an empty head, that's what.” Jessie smiled at the childish statement she made. Things needed to lighten up.

“Empty?” He rose up and looked down at her. “I bet I can still beat you in Quest World and THAT must make you pretty pathetic.”

“We'll see!” she chased after him and the two headed towards the lighthouse.

“Guess you'll be needed at the light house,” Race joked lightly as he watched the two teens disappear up the path.

“I don't mind,” Dr. Quest took in a deep breath. “It will help them to relax.”

“Jonny wouldn't let go of her,” Race spoke softly after a moment of silence passed. “He wouldn't let go of her

when the ambulance came and wanted to take her in and treat her.Â He wouldn't let go of her until I pulled him away."

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Race still had the image frozen forever in his brain.Â The picture of Jessie: beaten, bleeding and helpless.Â

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Then there was Jonny who was clearly lost without Jessie. Â Race couldn't remember ever seeing Jonny so 'still' before. It was a dangerous quiet that disturbed him.Â If they had been a moment late, Jonny would have strangled Micah with his bare hands- not that Race wouldn't have done the same.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "He just feels responsible for her." Dr. Quest replied without wanted to address it further.

Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â "Right," Race smiled. Jonny, who would have been checking Jessie as often as he had, if Race wasn't walking up and down the hallway like a guard. His smile widened.Â  
\_Right.\_

End  
file.